

## **SOLUTIONS TO HELP STOP DELIVERY OF JUNK MAIL**

### **1970 Supreme Court ruling gives control to the people**

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PALMDALE - The average American's mail every year contains about 40 pounds of unsolicited advertisements and promotional material: pre-approved credit-card offers, home refinancing offers, oil-change coupons, mail-order meat catalogs.

The Post Office delivers 17.8 tons of bulk mail each year nationally, but 44% of the material goes into the trash unopened and only 2% is responded to, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says.

People can take steps to stop, or at least slow, the flow of junk mail into their mail boxes, though the methods are sometimes cumbersome: direct mail firms and credit companies have established Web sites where people can ask to be taken off mailing lists, and the U.S. Post Office has a form that people can submit to block "erotically arousing" mail, the determination of which is up to the citizen.

"Everyman's mail today is made up overwhelmingly of material he did not seek from persons he does not know. And, all too often, it is matter he finds offensive," U.S. Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote in a 1970 Supreme Court ruling that upheld a federal law allowing people to block "pandering" advertisements.

Burger commented: "In today's complex society, we are inescapably captive audiences for many purposes, but a sufficient measure of individual autonomy must survive to permit every householder to exercise control over unwanted mail. ... Today's merchandising methods, the plethora of mass mailings subsidized by low postal rates, and the growth of the sale of large mailing lists as an industry, in itself, have changed the mailman from a carrier of primarily private communications, as he was in a more leisurely day, and have made him an adjunct of the mass mailer who sends unsolicited and often unwanted mail into every home."

The ruling was broad enough to give the citizen, rather than post office officials, authority to decide what was offensive.

"The result of this case is that all Americans have the right to stop direct mailers from sending them junk and from selling information about them," according to Jason Catlett, a computer scientist and professor who founded Junkbusters Corp. in 1996. "Unfortunately, most people are unaware of this, and exercising these rights is a chore.

Giant direct mail firm Valassis, formerly ADVO Inc., has its own Web site and form for getting your name and address off its mailing lists, the California Integrated Waste Management Board says. The form is available at [www.advo.com/consumersupport.html](http://www.advo.com/consumersupport.html). People can also call Valassis' consumer assistance line toll free at (888) 241-6760 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time.

The EPA suggests ways to cut down junk mail:

Register with the Mail Preference Service of the Direct Marketing Association, the largest supplier of mailing lists for commercial advertising, to remove your address from their list. The Web site is [www.dmachoice.org](http://www.dmachoice.org); click on the button "Remove my name from these lists."

Stop credit card offers, one of the largest sources of direct mail, by calling 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688). This lets you permanently remove your name and address from lists maintained by credit reporting agencies like Trans Union, Experian and Equifax, which are often used by credit card and insurance companies to send out direct mail.

Every time you order something over the phone, Internet, or through the mail, your name may be sold. Call or write the business or organization that you want a privacy designation on your name, address and phone number. Tell them that under no circumstances is your personal information to be sold. It may be helpful to make a list of all businesses that you interact with.

Whenever you subscribe to a magazine, become a member of a group, apply for a credit card, etc., be sure to state that you do not want your name, address, or phone number released to anyone else for marketing, mailing, or promotional purposes.

Get an unpublished phone number, an unlisted number, or list your phone number without an associated address. Many companies obtain and distribute your name, phone number, and address from phone listings. Unpublished numbers cannot be sold, while unlisted numbers are often sold to other companies on a CD-ROM. If you want to remain listed, request that your name be listed without your address.

Whenever you move, do not fill out the U.S. Post Office's permanent change of address form. Instead indicate that you are temporarily changing your address, which will allow you to have your mail forwarded for up to 10 months. Permanent COA information is shared with third parties, while temporary address information is not.

Do not send in product warranty cards unless absolutely necessary. They usually are not required. Many of these cards are filled with questions about your personal interests and preferences and are usually sent to a different address than the company you purchased the product from. Check product registrations to see if you can opt not to receive any further mailings.

Contests where you fill in a little entry blank are just another way companies get your name and address. If you fill one out at a football game, for example, expect to get a catalog of football merchandise within a few months. Avoid these if you don't want the mail.

To stop receiving any sexually oriented advertising, you can fill out the U.S. Post Office's Form 1500 to stop mail from a business you consider offensive.

The form, called "Application for Listing and/or Prohibitory Order," is available at [www.usps.com/forms/allforms.htm](http://www.usps.com/forms/allforms.htm) and at larger post offices.

Anti-junk mail organizations note that the 1970 Supreme Court ruling left it up to the citizen to declare what junk mail he finds sexually oriented and offensive. That means it can be used to stop other sorts of mail.

Junkbusters Corp. recommends mailing the form directly to the Post Office's pricing and classification service center, whose address is listed on the form, rather than taking it to a local post office.